

"Christ the Choir Master" Psalm 145

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[0:00] Our reading this morning comes from Psalm 145. I will extol you, my God and King, and bless your name forever and ever.

Every day I will bless you and praise your name forever and ever. Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised, and his greatness is unsearchable. One generation shall commend your works to another and shall declare your mighty acts.

On the glorious splendor of your majesty and on your wondrous works I will meditate. They shall speak of the might of your awesome deeds, and I will declare your greatness.

They shall pour forth the fame of your abundant goodness and shall sing aloud of your righteousness. The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. The Lord is good to all, and his mercy is over all that he has made. All your works shall give thanks to you, O Lord, and all your saints shall bless you. They shall speak of the glory of your kingdom and tell of your power, to make known to the children of man your mighty deeds and the glorious splendor of your kingdom.

[1:09] Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures throughout all generations. The Lord is faithful in all his words and kind in all his works. The Lord upholds all who are falling and raises up all who are bowed down.

The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season. You open your hand. You satisfy the desire of every living thing. The Lord is righteous in all his ways and kind in all his works. The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth. He fulfills the desire of those who fear him. He also hears their cry and saves them. The Lord preserves all who love him, but all the wicked he will destroy.

My mouth will speak the praise of the Lord, and let all flesh bless his holy name forever and ever. If you can turn to the psalm that Nisa read for us, Psalm 145, we continue our summer series in the last book of the Psalter, Psalm 145.

But before we get into it, just a bit of an opening. We were on vacation. We went out east this summer. One of the days we were driving to a beach, the fellow travelers in my car all fell asleep.

[2:27] So I turned on the radio quietly and found CBC Radio, the Atlantic CBC Radio. And they had a University of Alberta psychologist.

But I think he's also like a business professor. And they were interviewing him on a very interesting book he wrote. And the book is entitled Don't Be Yourself.

Why Authenticity is Overrated and What to Do Instead. That was very interesting. My ears perked right up. The idea being that our true selves in the workplace should be replaced with actually conformity, agreeability, a greater awareness of others.

It's not a bad thing to swim with the stream. And it's really an interesting pushback against our current cultural moment where being authentic is a chief virtue.

Maybe it's even a kind of pseudo-religion. The idea, I think, is personally, I found it very refreshing. However, the conversation was about navigating the workplace.

[3:40] Not applying this abandoning of authenticity to every area of your life. Conviction, individuality, and I would say, yes, authenticity.

They are very important. They are very important things to consider and to not abandon. And it's interesting because throughout the Bible, authentic, heartfelt worship of God, it's not really optional, but it is required by God.

It's prescribed by the writers of Scripture. Those who worship otherwise, with hearts that are cold, with an inauthentic posture towards the Lord, oftentimes they're called hypocrites in the Bible.

Their worship is rejected by God. So, at its very core, biblical Christianity holds that authentic worship is very germane to what God expects of us as his people.

So, we have a psalm this morning, Psalm 145. And it's an interesting psalm. In fact, Charles Spurgeon, if you know this name, no surprise he'd say this.

[4:57] If you don't know, Charles Spurgeon was a 19th century Baptist preacher. Interestingly, this is such an aside, I probably should have cut it out, but nevertheless, the Met downtown, when it was downtown, it was fashioned after Charles Spurgeon's church in London.

Anyways, this is some random trivia for you. But anyway, Spurgeon, this big, giant evangelical of the 19th century, he said of Psalm 145, it was the crown jewel of David's praise psalms in all of the Psalter.

The crown jewel, he called it. And it's a fantastic psalm, but one thing it does is it makes it very clear, King David does, as the choir leader, as the praise leader of his people, that praise to God should be unreserved, our whole self, everything within us, and it should be forever and every day. Okay, so unreserved forever, every day. See if you can spot it with me in verses 1 to 3, the opening of our psalm. A song of praise of David.

I will extol you, my God and King, and bless your name forever and ever. Every day I will bless you, and praise your name forever and ever. Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised, and his greatness is unsearchable.

[6:20] David is not just leading the people in singing God's praises, he is prescribing a type of praise that they are to engage in. I find this a very difficult opening bit, and I'll tell you the reason why, and maybe you'll agree with me.

If we are commanded to authentically, wholeheartedly praise God every single day, every moment of every day, that our lives are fashioned around it, that it will be something that we are to do without ceasing, and with zeal, I can't keep that up.

It is a command that I cannot keep, and I think it is, and maybe I'm being a bit overly pessimistic, but this will help us frame the rest of our time in Psalm 145.

I think it's kind of unfair. It's an unfair thing for David to ask of his people. So, this is really going to be a time, the next, say, 20, 25 minutes, where we're going to talk about what praise is, and how to understand Psalm 145 as not some unfair command, but something that will give us life.

It will feed our souls. If you are new to the Christian faith, or you are on the fence, or you're just here, and you're not sure where you're at, this is a Sunday where you've got to kind of peek behind the curtain to see how Christianity really works.

[7:56] And it is far from this perfect put-together faith where everybody who's a Christian worships God perfectly. It can be difficult, and it can be trying, but we're going to walk towards it.

So, if authentic and heartfelt worship is at the very center of the Christian faith, how do we, humanly speaking, worship the Lord properly?

We're going to consider two points this morning. God's greatness and God's goodness. And we're going to walk towards these two points and see if we can make sense of what David is commanding us to do.

Our first point, God's greatness. We're going to read the opening three verses again, and we're going to kind of crawl through the text, kind of going back and forth through different sections. Verse 1 to 3. I will extol you, my God and King, and bless your name forever and ever. Every day I will bless you and praise your name forever and ever.

[8:55] Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised, and his greatness is unsearchable. David begins the psalm. By proclaiming God's praise in the highest way, he extols the Lord as God and King.

To extol is to highly esteem, as one would a monarch, which is very fitting, because David himself, he is a monarch. He is royal in his house as royal.

He understands the importance of honoring royalty. He esteems the Lord as the greatest king over everything that exists. There is no higher authority than the Lord.

There is no stronger power than God himself. There is no being that is more knowledgeable. There is no rival kingdom that can somehow usurp God's kingship.

He is unchanging. He is ultimately worthy of all the praise. And this is precisely what is captured in this term, where David says he is extolling the Lord as God and King.

[10:07] God's name alone is the only name deserving of this forever blessing, this forever praise. So to truly understand God's greatness in a very real sense is impossible.

We can understand aspects of what God is, what he has done, his greatness. But to somehow exhaust a real deep dive, a real understanding of God's greatness is something that's beyond us. This is what David is getting at in verse 3. Great is the Lord, greatly to be praised, and his greatness is unsearchable. It doesn't mean that God is mysterious as if he is far off.

He has made himself known. But to understand his fullness, to understand God as only God can understand God, it's an impossible task for us. And yet, here we have it very clearly that God has revealed himself to us.

So that we, finite created beings, can understand the infinite creator of all things. This is especially the case when we consider Christ.

[11:15] We see this unsearchable God in the person and work of Jesus Christ, the greatness of God. For if we have seen Christ, he says to us, we have seen the Father.

God is indeed great, and he is worthy of our praise. David continues on in verses 4 through 6, and this is what he says.

One generation shall commend your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts on the glorious splendor of your majesty, and on your wondrous works I will meditate.

They shall speak of the might of your awesome deeds, and I will declare your greatness. It is precisely because God is great.

He's so much greater than anything in the known universe, in the created order, in the world that we inhabit, that his acts can be understood as magnificent.

[12:12] Notice verse 5 again, his glorious splendor, his majesty. It's deeply connected to his wondrous works. It is because God is greater, it is because God is great that his acts are wondrous.

A great God can't do unwondrous acts. Everything he does is magnificent. Everything he does.

David is drawing our attention to God and his goodness and his splendor.

So you see, front and center in David's mind, when we think of God's glorious acts being connected to his greatness, any Israelite, David included, he'll think about the Exodus. If you're unfamiliar with the Exodus, Israel's enslaved for 400 years, and what ends up happening?

They cry out to God for salvation, and God shows up in a magnificent way. But he is acting on behalf of his people, and his acts are awesome.

They're also terrifying. But we understand that God's greatness and his acts, they are not to be divorced from one another. David goes on to talk about communicating this from one generation to another.

[13:28] Such things, they are worthy of transmission. Just as monumental events in history, they are remembered. I mean, I think the, I don't know if it's for certain, but by far in this congregation, and amongst the people I talk to, the most popular podcast is this podcast called The Rest is History.

It's just story after story after story throughout history. People sharing, these two hosts, they're sharing what has happened. It's worth transmission. A good story is worth telling.

David is saying precisely this. Share the stories of what God has done. Testify to his goodness, because it is the greatest, most epic story that has ever been written, that has ever existed.

But I'll say this as well, and I think it's important for us to consider. Scripture is the testament to God's interaction with humankind, okay, throughout history.

This is salvation history. This is our history. But there's also history that has happened after the Scriptures, where God has continued to move. Why? Because he's unchanging throughout history.

[14:40] So we can read about revivals. We can read about big moves of God throughout history. But even more than that, we can share and testify about how God has been active in our families.

Stories that will never make the rest of history, okay? They're not going to be found in books. But surely we can testify and share from generation to generation how God has seen us through difficulties, how he has provided in our time of need, how he has opened our eyes to truth, He has ministered to our souls.

That is worthy of transmitting. That is our history. That is your history. Write some of this stuff down. Share it with your kids. And if you're so blessed to one day have grandkids or grandnieces and nephews, share it with them.

Testify and share it boldly and with great worship towards the Lord. Testify to God's goodness and greatness to the next generation.

Testify and share it with God. There's this interesting story where Jesus, he heals a widow's son, okay? The widow's son has fallen asleep, has died, and he has resuscitated this son.

[15 : 56] And the people marveled, rightfully so. They were also very afraid. But then there's this interesting line in the story, and it says, God has surely visited us.

And friends, I'll just say this. God is in the business of visiting us. He is in the business of hearing our prayers and showing that continued greatness that he has shown through stories like in the Exodus to this day.

Don't be afraid to say, hey, listen, God has visited us. He has come in my time of need. He has helped me out. He has ministered to my soul. God has visited me. It's a wonderful thing to share. David continues. Verses 11, 12. And then we'll read just the first part of verse 13. Verse 11. See, deeply connected to God's glory, his greatness as king is the idea of a kingdom.

A king has a kingdom. It makes sense. And we see this in these three verses. Three verses, four times, five if you include dominion in this.

[17 : 25] Five times it is mentioned something about God's kingdom. God's kingdom, it features huge throughout the scriptures, especially in the New Testament. God's kingdom, it's glorious, it's splendid.

It's everlasting. It's enduring throughout all generations. It extends to every person in every land, in every generation. Whether or not somebody bends a knee to Christ as king, it does not matter.

He is king of all. And his kingdom then extends and continues to extend into this world. It is a kingdom unlike any other kingdom, any other government, any other country.

The culture of the kingdom of God is perfect. Okay, it's perfect in every way. There is no evil in his kingdom. There is no rival kingdom that can overtake it, just like there's no rival king that can overtake the Lord.

In God's kingdom there is fullness of joy. There is real, true equity. There is perfection. There is wisdom. Our leader, the king of all, God himself, ruling in his kingdom, means that this kingdom is, in every respect, perfect.

[18 : 43] And will not fail, will not fall. It's this wonderful, beautiful picture. And we see this supremely in the ministry of Jesus, who came declaring in the beginning of Mark's gospel account, the kingdom of God is at hand.

So Jesus, if we're wondering what the kingdom looks like, we read the testimony, the four gospel accounts of Jesus, and we see what the kingdom of God looks like.

So in the kingdom of God, there is perfect health. Okay? There is healing. There is deliverance.

There is true joy. There is redemption. Again, this is all tied to God's greatness.

In his goodness, which we'll see in the next section, but in his greatness, that God, the great king, has an incredible kingdom that he continues to spread.

So we see in these verses, in verses 1 to 3 and 4 to 6, 11, 12, and 13, we see this aspect of the greatness of God.

[19 : 47] Okay? His attributes are great. His acts are great. And his kingdom is great. And these things are deeply intertwined and connected.

And we see that Christ embodies all three. That if we see Christ, we see God, as he says in his high priestly prayer. Jesus embodies the greatness of God.

But it's not just the greatness of God that is on display for David will begin to talk about the goodness of God. Again, I'm separating these things for the sake of kind of clarity in a sermon, but it would be very problematic if you left here and you think that these things are kind of separate.

They're deeply intertwined. To talk about God's greatness is to talk about his goodness, goodness, greatness. Nevertheless, let's move on to our second point and look at God's goodness. These next few verses, verses 7, 8, and 9, they are really the pinnacle of this psalm.

And especially verse 8, it's the pinnacle of the Old Testament and potentially the pinnacle of the Bible. And this is what it says. Read with me. The second part of, no, all of verse 7, 8, and 9.

[20 : 59] Praise the Lord from the earth. You great, oh, I'm reading the wrong psalm. I turned the page. My apologies. Keep you guys on your toes. They shall pour forth the fame of your abundant goodness and shall sing aloud of your righteousness.

The Lord is gracious and merciful. This is verse 8. The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love. The Lord is good to all and his mercy is over all that he has made. Hmm. Verse 8 in particular. It's beautiful. And the first time we really encounter it is after God rescues Israel from Egyptian slavery, takes this whole multitude of people into the desert, and then meets with the people through their representative, Moses.

And Moses asks this really interesting question, okay? He says, God, show me your glory. And then God passes before him. And then not long after that, in the same scene, God says, verse 8, and I'll read it again.

The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love. Moses asks to see the glory of God, and what does God do?

[22:18] He says, this is my glory, to show goodness and mercy and love to all. It's a remarkable thing. I mean, if you read the story, there's lightning, there's clouds, there's some crazy, intense imagery at Mount Sinai.

But isn't it wonderful and remarkable that Moses asks to see the glory of God, okay? And God responds by saying that he is merciful, that he is gracious, that he is abounding, abounding in steadfast love.

It's a remarkable thing. At the very core of who God is, is goodness, okay? It's like this umbrella term of all of the wonderful, most beautiful things you can think of.

The highest qualities, the best attributes, the nicest, kindest, gracious, most loving person you can think of, but on overload.

This is what is encapsulated with this term, goodness, that I'm using this morning. God, his character is first to show mercy, to show love, to delay judgment in order to make room for repentance and redemption, and to extend grace, unmerited favor, to lift up.

[23:41] And all of this, again, because he is steadfast and faithful in his love. What's interesting here is that God's goodness is in perfect alignment with his attributes.

Such a love, therefore, emanates from who God is. So God freely loves, okay? What God doesn't do is find himself in a bit of a pickle or in a bit of a jam where he is compelled to love, okay?

That somehow, somebody's got the jump on him, and now he owes them. No. The love of God is always freely given because it emanates from his very character of who he is.

That means God doesn't begrudgingly extend mercy. He doesn't begrudgingly extend grace. He enjoys it. He loves to do so.

And what's interesting, we see this in verse 9, is that this love that's specifically geared, aimed at his covenant people, so the people that have faith in him, it pours out to the world.

[24:52] Look at verse 9 again. The Lord is good to all, and his mercy is over all that he has made. This isn't to say that God is extending salvation to everybody, but that his desire is always to extend his love in the same way that his kingdom continues to push boundaries.

David continues to speak of God's goodness in verse 14 all the way down to verse 20, highlighting God's works of goodness. And I want you to notice as I'm reading this, all of the verbs associated with God's goodness.

All of the actions of blessing that he extends. Look with me at verse 14 and following. The Lord upholds all who are falling and raises up all who are bowed down.

The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season. You open your hand. You satisfy the desires of every living thing.

The Lord is righteous in all his ways and kind in all his works. The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth.

[26:06] He fulfills the desire of those who fear him. He also hears their cry and saves them. The Lord preserves all who love him, but all the wicked he will destroy.

God is kind in all his works. Verse 17. That's a wonderful summary. He is kind in all his works. In such a broken world that's full of calamity, he is moved to act out of goodness.

Everything he does, an expression of his goodness. He's not merely the God of the Israelites either, right? He raises all. Again, not in a universal sense, but in an indiscriminate way.

Without prejudice. He doesn't focus on one group, or one language, or one era, or one age. Rather, his desire is always, always to bless.

Throughout time, theologians have called this the common grace of God. He makes it rain on the just and the unjust all the same. And we see here that it is an aspect of his goodness that he does

so.

[27:16] But he also hears the cries of salvation, and he answers. He provides salvation. God makes himself accessible. Not by making a way for us to ascend to him, but by descending to us.

The very act of revelation, the fact that we have a Bible, is God descending to us. This is especially the case with the incarnation. And this is why the incarnation is such a remarkable, glorious, key aspect to our faith.

That God, the Son of God, descended to us, condescended, and took up human flesh. That God came to us, but did not somehow compel us to come to him.

An impossible task. But he comes to us. God makes himself accessible. Again, all his works are good. But here's the thing.

What do we read? What do we make sense of verse 19 and 20? We read it, and it says that he fulfills the desires of those who fear him. I mean, that doesn't seem like a loving act, right?

[28:28] That he'll only act when we fear him. And then verse 20, all the wicked he will destroy. How are we to make sense of these two verses in light of God's benevolence, of his goodness, of his love?

Why the mention of fear and destruction at all? It would have been nice to just tie a bow on this psalm and be on our way, but this is what it says.

Let me try to address each. Verse 19. I'm actually just going to quote. I don't usually like to do this, but I'm just going to read this quote and just kind of leave it where it's at. This is from a Lutheran theologian from yester century.

A guy named Franz, I don't know how to pronounce his last name, Delch? You know, he has a tough last name, but he has a wonderful quote, and this is what it says. Fear and love of God belong inseparably together.

For fear without love is an unfree, servile disposition. And love without fear, bold-faced familiarity. The one dishonors the all-gracious one, and the other dishonors the all-exalted one.

[29:41] I think that's a fine, fine, fine understanding of why fear is in that list, and why fear is not disconnected from the love of God.

How about verse 20? God destroying the wicked. I'll just say this. There's 21 verses in Psalm 145. Half of one verse makes mention of the wicked getting destroyed. The rest of it, it just gushes with God's goodness.

And that's no mistake. God, his desire, his nature, like I've stressed, it's always to bless, always to redeem, right? He is slow to anger, not quick to anger, slow to anger.

He delays judgment. Not by a week, okay? Not by a month or a year, centuries we have in the scriptures of him delaying justice. Delaying justice. Why?

[30:40] So that people could turn from their wickedness and so live. The judgment of God is not his first instinct.

And I think it's very clear that there's just a half of a verse out of 21 that makes mention of that. But I think there's more to it because if God didn't judge evil, then his goodness and his love would be fairly meaningless.

I'll give an example. When our boy was four, he was in junior kindergarten. And there was a boy, and he was a bit of a troubled boy, but he was pushing our boy every day, all right?

So we asked him, Joseph, did you get pushed today? He goes, oh, yeah. And then sometimes he'd have like scrapes on his knees and stuff like that. I wanted to like destroy the four-year-old.

I'm a grown man. I didn't. But like I was, I had borderline rage. Don't touch my son. Like we talked to teachers. It kept happening. He's a four-year-old kid, okay?

[31:42] Like I'm not, kids are weird. So it happens. But my love for my son made me angry towards somebody else that was pushing him around.

If I was indifferent, I'd say, listen, like sucks to be you, kid. Like figure it out. That wouldn't be a loving response, okay? That would not be a love that had any guts to it, any backbone to it, any foundation underneath it.

Because God judges the wicked, even though he delays judgment, it is a sign of his love. Because evil always will seek to destroy and unravel and break apart and alienate.

All things that are the antithesis of who God is and his character. And he will not stand for it. He will be faithful. This is what the righteousness of God is all about. He has made promises and he will see them through.

So his judgment is actually an aspect of his love. So we see here that God's goodness, including his judgment, is evident because he acts on our behalf.

[32:51] He is the initiator. He is steadfast. He desires that none should perish, but that all would have eternal life. He upholds. He blesses. He redeems. He heals.

He restores. He delivers. He provides. He gives. He loves. He loves. This is the goodness of God on full display. And as with his greatness, we see that the goodness of God is perfectly fulfilled in Jesus Christ, in his ministry, his passion, his resurrection, his ascension, and his reign.

So we'll close with this. How do we answer the question I posed at the beginning? How do we authentically worship God every day with full zeal forever?

And hopefully you've noticed that I haven't actually talked a lot about us, of what to do. Instead, what have we done? We've focused on God and who he is and what he does. On his greatness, on his goodness.

You see, this is the real answer. When we get hung up on ourselves and we get hung up on ourselves, do we not? Naval gazing. It extends to our worship.

[34:02] We're not doing enough. Or, look how wonderful I am. I worship God. I do my devotions. I haven't missed it. The daily offices. Check, check, check. Fantastic.

And you get a bit puffed up. Either way, the view is not up. It's in. David here is telling us, listen, the focus is actually on the triune God.

Direct your gaze upward. Think about and dwell upon the greatness of God. Whether or not you feel like it. Think about his goodness. Testify to somebody about the wonderful acts of the Lord.

And how it emanates from his very character and his attributes. And how encompassed in all of this is Jesus Christ who perfectly displays it. Fully man and fully God.

Make less of yourself. Make much of God. I think this is the whole direction of the psalm. The reality is this. If we could worship God with perfect zeal every day and forever, I'm not sure we would need a savior.

[35:13] We would not need Jesus the Messiah. He would be unnecessary. But it's precisely because we can't. Okay? It's precisely because we are riddled with selfishness. That we need a savior.

And in Jesus we have this picture of actually the greatest worshiper that has ever walked the earth. He worshipped the Father perfectly. Much of Jesus' high priestly prayer in John concerns him glorifying or praising or bringing honor or extolling the Father.

See, King David, he's certainly speaking of his own worship towards the Lord as the choir master of Israel. But if you know anything about David's story, he didn't even follow this advice.

Okay? He was a terrible, terrible, terrible sinner. His family was in shambles. He did not perfectly worship the Lord with zeal every day forever.

He just didn't do it. And that's why David ultimately isn't pointing to himself as the example. But he's pointing to the future. To the one who would come, who would be fully man and yet still fully God.

[36:24] Worshipping perfectly the one true God in his humanity as a perfect person. And the promise is that if we are in Christ, if he is the object of our praise, whether or not we are doing it perfectly.

But if he is the object of our praise, that he will lead us in singing God's praises. He will give us the very spirit so that we can begin to lift our gaze up.

So that it is no longer directed towards ourselves. For one day at the end of the age, we will use all of this language that King David is using.

So that's one thing I never touched on. I mean, we only have so much time. But if you go through it, David will use an incredible, incredible amount of language to describe his worship. He'll say stuff like, he'll extol God, he'll bless God, he'll praise God, he'll commend to others God's goodness and greatness.

He will declare, he will meditate, he will speak, he will pour forth, he will sing aloud, and he'll give thanks. And this is what the Christian life is. As we look to Christ away from ourselves and trust that by his Holy Spirit, he is helping us to worship like him.

[37:38] You know, the great irony is that being authentic will make us very inauthentic, trying to be authentic. But when we look to Christ, we will be fashioned to be just like him.

And we'll be our authentic selves in the end. And the joy and the privilege for us is that we begin to enjoy such worship and authenticity now.

So, a closing question for you. Will you learn to join Christ's choir? Will you learn from him and sing with him, glorifying the Father?
Will you follow his lead in praising and extolling the Lord? Will you lift up your gaze from yourself and look to him?